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Surveillance Of CIA

Past efforts to bring the Central Intelligence Agency under some meaningful scrutiny by Congress have not gone far. Those who espouse the CIA's viewpoint have thwarted such moves. Their central argument is that the CIA's effectiveness as a highly secret undertaking would be crippled if Congress were to ask embarrassing questions.

This argument has come up against some which, in our judgment, are more than its match. The CIA's role is being increasingly into question for its evident dabbling in foreign policy. Some of its clandestine operations are demonstrably not for the purpose of gathering intelligence, but sometimes constitute interference in the internal affairs of other nations.

This imperils the national interest of the United States. The fact that little is known about CIA operations, that observers are forced into the tricky waters of conjecture, is in itself dangerous. Secret or not, the CIA should in reasonable measure be subject to the same rule that applies to all federal agencies: it is the public's business and the public has a right to know, within bounds, what it is up to.

It is against this background that one must consider the current attempts, by Senators Stephen M. Young and J. McCarthy, to assert the congressional right of oversight over the CIA as over other agencies. Senator McCarthy would clear the air with a "full and complete hearing" to be made by a Foreign Relations subcommittee on the CIA affects U.S. foreign relations. Young wants Congress to set up a permanent joint Senate-House committee to keep an eye on the intelligence agency. Both proposals have merit, and the first might indeed provide valuable guidelines for operation of a committee. Properly handled, surveillance by such a committee would not hurt the CIA and might keep it from getting out of control.